



Researchers Find 24 Species Believed New to Science in PNG Highlands

Alotau (24 October 2007) – Scientists exploring the remote Mount Kaijende Highlands of Enga Province in Papua New Guinea (PNG) discovered 24 species believed to be new to science - 16 species of plants and eight species of frogs, including a probable new genus.

Presented in a report made public today at the 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature and Conservation and Protected Areas, the findings of a 2005 expedition led by Conservation International's Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) and Papua New Guinea's Department of Environment and Conservation demonstrate the value of exploring unknown regions such as PNG's remote highlands to assess conservation needs and to inform development decisions.

The study - sponsored by Porgera Joint Venture (PJV), 95% owned by Barrick Gold Corporation – provides information for policymakers and other decision-makers trying to balance development with protecting important biodiversity that benefits local communities and the global ecosystem.

"The vast near-uninhabited Kaijende Highlands boasts some of PNG's most pristine and scenic montane habitat, but very little is known about it, despite mining in the area and recognition of its exceptional conservation values nearly 20 years ago," says Dr Steve Richards of the South Australia Museum, lead researcher and editor of the expedition report. "Our findings will be used to inform future conservation activities, the PJV mining operation and development decisions by the local and national government."

"The protection of wildlife is a priority for Barrick and we are proud to be collaborating with Conservation International and the PNG government," Barrick's PNG Country Manager Ila Temu said. "At Barrick we are committed to protecting and enhancing the environment in areas we operate and promoting biodiversity conservation in the country."

The RAP survey, from 19 August to 9 September 2005, included eight scientists from CI, the South Australian Museum, the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation, and other PNG national and local government bodies. They surveyed several sites in the Kaijende Highlands, covering lower montane rainforest (Lake Tawa), upper montane rainforest (Paiela Road), and sub-alpine grassland and stunted upper montane rainforest mosaics (Omyaka and Waile Creek) in PNG's central cordillera.

In total the RAP survey documented 643 species, including at least 16 species of plants and eight species of frogs that are believed new to science. One of the frogs probably represents a new genus. Significant range extensions were recorded for several threatened and little-known taxa including the Giluwe Rat (*Rattus giluwensis*), the Long-bearded Melidectes honeyeater (*Melidectes princeps*), and the frog species *Litoria becki* and *Callulops glandulosus*. A spectacular bird of paradise known as the Ribbon-tailed *Astrapia* (*Astrapia mayeri*) - which has the longest tail feathers in relation to body size of any bird - was found to be abundant relative to other areas of PNG.

In their final report, the scientists called for the outstanding scenic and conservation values of the Kaijende Highlands to be protected. They recommend a management plan be developed to reduce the threats posed by climate change, increasing fire frequency, development and hunting. Conservation International, in partnership with PJV and the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation are working with local communities to have the region formally declared as a protected area.

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Photos available at

[http://images.conservation.org/admin/packaging/viewtransmit_ext.aspx?messageId=101857
&userName=szumbrunn&session=c994b419f1b04578552644f884914df5](http://images.conservation.org/admin/packaging/viewtransmit_ext.aspx?messageId=101857&userName=szumbrunn&session=c994b419f1b04578552644f884914df5)

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Full report available at <http://www.biodiversityscience.org/portal/server.pt>

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Conservation International (CI) applies innovations in science, economics, policy and community participation to protect the Earth's richest regions of plant and animal diversity and demonstrate that human societies can live harmoniously with nature. Founded in 1987, CI works in more than 40 countries on four continents to help people find economic alternatives without harming their natural environments. For more information about CI, visit www.conservation.org.